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BRIEFING NOTE

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This briefing note summarizes the key findings from the research project "*Expanding Korea-Canada Defence Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,*" funded by the Korea Foundation. The project examined emerging opportunities for deeper collaboration in four areas: cyber security, defence industrial partnerships, Arctic security, and maritime security.

Context

- The security environment in the Indo-Pacific has changed rapidly over the past several years. Intensifying security threats—including North Korea's missile provocations and its deepening military ties with Russia, the expansion of Chinese military capabilities, global supply chain disruptions, and economic uncertainty brought by U.S. tariffs—are reshaping the geopolitical landscape. In this context, cooperation among like-minded middle powers has become increasingly important.

- Canada and the Republic of Korea (ROK) are well positioned to strengthen this type of cooperation. The two countries share democratic values and a strong interest in promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific, while building more resilient economic and defence partnerships.

- Since the two countries elevated their relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2022, defence cooperation has emerged as one of the main pillars of the bilateral relationship. Key developments include the inaugural Canada-ROK Foreign and Defence (2+2) Ministerial Meeting in November 2024 and the second meeting in February 2026; the signing of the Canada-Republic of Korea Security and Defence Cooperation Partnership in October 2025; and an Agreement on the Protection of Military and Defence Classified Information in February 2026.

- Overall, Canada-ROK defence cooperation is no longer limited to political dialogue or a symbolic partnership but is gradually becoming increasingly practical and operational.

Key Findings from the Project

- One of the main findings of the project is that Canada-ROK defence cooperation is expanding into new areas.

    - North Korea's evolving cyber operations demonstrate that security threats are no longer limited to traditional military activity. As a result, closer collaboration

between Canada and the ROK in areas such as cyber security, information-sharing, and emerging technologies is becoming increasingly important.

- Canada has identified cyber security cooperation as a key component of its Indo-Pacific Strategy. In fact, there has been a noticeable increase in practical cooperation. In 2025, Canada and the ROK advanced their cyber security cooperation by participating jointly as a team in several cyber defence exercises.

- Deeper cooperation in emerging security domains such as cyber security would strengthen not only bilateral defence ties but also broader regional resilience against shared threats.

- A second major finding is that defence industrial partnerships represent an important but still underdeveloped opportunity.

  - The ROK has become one of the world's fastest growing defence exporters, with advanced capabilities in shipbuilding, manufacturing, and defence technology. ROK defence products offer systems that are interoperable with the United States and are already in service with several of Canada's close allies.

  - At the same time, Canada aims to strengthen its defence industrial base and diversify its defence partnerships. Diversification should involve not only reinforcing existing partnerships but also expanding engagement with non-traditional partners.

  - Canada-ROK defence partnership has the potential to expand into long-term industrial and technological collaboration. Many opportunities remain to be explored, including in shipbuilding, land systems, guided weapons, aerospace, and emerging technologies. The key will be identifying strengths in each country that can complement one other.

- The project also explored opportunities for cooperation beyond the Indo-Pacific, particularly by linking the Arctic and the North Pacific.

  - Canada's recent defence and Arctic policies recognize that protecting its North can no longer rely solely on traditional Euro-Atlantic partnerships but requires broader engagement with like-minded partners across the North Pacific.

  - This creates new opportunities for cooperation between Canada and the ROK. Although the ROK is not an Arctic state, its long-standing scientific presence,

advanced shipbuilding capabilities, and growing interest in Arctic shipping routes demonstrate that it is already an active stakeholder in the region.

- Canada and South Korea can pursue cooperation in areas such as scientific research, developing Arctic-capable vessels and autonomous systems, energy security, and protecting the environment and Indigenous lands. They can also explore opportunities for joint exercises and training in Arctic conditions.

- Finally, maritime security has emerged as one of the most practical areas for expanding cooperation.

  - Both countries share strong interests in protecting freedom of navigation, reinforcing the rules-based international order, and contributing to stability in the Indo-Pacific.

  - Canada's participation in naval deployments and multinational operations and exercises, such as Operation HORIZON, NEON, and RIMPAC, provides a strong foundation for expanding cooperation with the ROK Navy.

  - Building on this foundation, the two countries can strengthen their partnership across operational, technological, and strategic domains. They can increase joint exercises and operations to enhance interoperability, deepen cooperation on maritime domain awareness and information-sharing, and pursue partnerships in developing naval vessels and systems.

Conclusion

- The research project shows that Canada-ROK defence cooperation is entering a new phase. The relationship is no longer defined only by historical ties or political dialogue, but increasingly by practical cooperation in areas such as cyber security, the defence industry, and maritime security.

- Further, the research demonstrates that the partnership still has significant room to grow. Strengthening defence cooperation with the ROK would not only support Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy but also help position Canada as a more reliable and strategic security partner in the region.

- Canada's new Defence Industrial Strategy also underscores the importance of closer cooperation with trusted Indo-Pacific partners such as the ROK. Canada should prioritize defence industrial collaboration with the ROK as a key area of the bilateral

relationship, particularly in areas such as shipbuilding, advanced manufacturing, and emerging technologies.

About the Author

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Julie has previously worked as a Research Intern at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and a Global Asia Fellow at the East Asia Foundation. She has published various articles and a book chapter, including in the Journal of East Asian Studies, BTI Country Report – North Korea, and Global Asia. Her research interests include authoritarian regimes, geopolitics with a regional focus on the Korean Peninsula, and Canada-Korea defence cooperation.

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